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ments in new forms, without any exact parallel in any other country—the shrewd transcripts of every-day life humorously displayed in the lively farce-comedies of Charles Hoyt—the increasingly veracious studies of the vividly contrasting types of immigrants in the tenement-house district, beginning with the crude song and dance of the “Mulligan Guards” and culminating in “Squatter Sovereignty,” the masterpiece of Edward Harrigan—and finally the chaotic conglomerates of the joyously irrepressible Weber and Fields.

Over against these things which stand to the credit of our American theater must be placed the regret that as yet no American playwright has come forward with a drama as weighty as Pinero’s “Thunderbolt” or as Paul Hervieu’s “Trail of the Torch.” It may be that an American dramatist, richly enough endowed to rival these masterpieces, is already at work and that we may be gratified at any moment by an invitation to sit in judgment on what he has wrought. This richly endowed dramatist, veteran or novice, will have to reckon with the customary audience of the American theater, disproportionately youthful and disproportionately feminine. He will have to face the fact that an audience predominately youthful is certain to be more interested in plot than in character, to be ro-

manticist and optimistic, to be ignorant of the bitter experiences of life and to be unwilling to gaze at them, to be enthusiastic and eager and in a hurry. He will need to recognize that an audience predominately feminine is certain to be more interested in the quantity of emotion than in its quality, to lack relish for the robust forms of humor, to prefer sentimentality to sentiment, to resent the telling of the truth, even if it is not the whole truth, and to be defective in that sense of justice which is not common even among men.

These characteristics of the two most important constituent elements of the American audience the American dramatist will have to take into account; and he will have to select his story, combine his plot, create his characters, project his vision of life, in a word, he will have to express himself amply if not completely, in spite of these handicaps which would seem to Goethe simply crushing. Probably, when all is said, they are not really heavier than those under which the dramatists of other countries have labored and over which they have triumphed. Yet no playwright can ever hope to achieve success by ignoring the opinions and prejudices and peculiarities of the spectators he has to please; he must grapple with these imponderables and conquer the good-will of the audience despite them.

Brander Matthews

THE ÆSTHETIC IDEAL

By FR. ROUSSEL-DESPIERRES

Continued from the October Number

CHAPTER II—THREE METHODS

THE ideal is at one and the same time sentiment and thought. Under these two aspects the ideal escapes from all dogmatic authority. In its essence it is an individual act of faith and one has a right to ask how philosophy could create a common ideal and impose it on men’s minds. Let the reader be reassured! there is no intention to impose a new dogma; philosophy, like thought itself, refuses all constraint; she has no other means than persuasion. Every man who affirms an ideal does the work of a philosopher. The vocation of philosophic writers is to facilitate the task of sincere minds who are struggling to reach certainty and to conceive a rational will; they propose to those who, suffering from doubt, lack the energy of seeking the truth, such doctrines as will soothe and sustain them.

A complete philosophy would include an acceptable explanation of the world and the First Cause, a definition of our destiny and the principles of morality. Such a philosophy will be made. We dare hope that it lies in the power of any man of good-will to erect a philosophy as solid as the most scientific constructions of thought. In order to bring us fairly to this enterprise there exist three methods, perhaps of unequal sureness, none of which, however, exceed the powers of an attentive and reflecting intelligence. These three methods conduct us to identical conclusions.

The first one, perhaps a bit mystical, has for its principle the exact conception that every man possesses concerning being, good and duty. To con-

ceive of a duty is to create it; to imagine an ideal is to will it. Will is nothing but a conception founded in conscience, one which imposes itself by a kind of internal evidence. By its own being it is a fact, a reality, just as the work of art springs from the brain and hands of the artist. The proof that it is real is, that it acts upon external reality to modify the same. The voluntary ideal thus demonstrates and justifies its own existence while affirming itself.

Creative will has no need of the support of a belief, since in itself it is an affirmation, a belief. It carries its own certitude in itself precisely because it is a fact, in reality. It ignores or dominates the dogmas which would strangle it. The reason for existence and its legitimacy derive from its nobility and from the thought which animates it. The right of the ideal has for its foundation its own superiority; never is the will more prolific than when it seems the most chimerical; for instance: if it is in revolt against the barbarism of a religious dogma or a scientific law, whether it be the eternal damnation of sinners or the implacable war for existence. In the revolt against divine horrors it raises up the human soul bowed down but not moralized by terror; by throwing itself between the combatants it pacifies the blood-thirsty instincts and moderates the violence of combat.

The ideal of every man by its very definition is the highest thing which he is able to conceive. The deep root of our conceptions and wills is no other, in fact, than desire, or rather perhaps love. I do not

dream of, I do not linger over and do not love to imagine aught else than the thing which I love—and what I love, I wish for; not to desire it is impossible to me. So the ideal imposes itself upon the will through the triumphant evidence of the desire. It would be a contradiction if it were not the highest point which each intelligence could conceive of, because the illusion and the torment of perfection are inherent in the human mind, and therefore, the dream of the greatest imaginable good is a fatal dream. All of us aspire to that good from afar, and if we do not dare to pursue it, we hope confusedly for a sort of miracle, through which we make it real. The waiting for the miracle is already the ideal itself.

There is nothing further needed to the pursuit of one's dream than to understand this fact hitherto contested: the will, the conception itself are already action; they begin to realize themselves in themselves as soon as they formulate themselves and affirm themselves.

Born of desire and love, the voluntary ideal will have the smiling seduction of Beauty. A man free to choose his will shall be optimistic, because it is toward good that he inclines, and he believes in it because he inclines that way. One feels what will be the fortune of that ideal of joy. Human malignity has religious pessimism for its last ailment. Hellion acts through terror and sterilizes the soul which it desolates. Love alone fecundates the moral law.

Morality, out of which for so long a time they have made I know not what sinister and dolorous fury (*Megæra*) is on the contrary a happy and tender fairy. It is under such charming traits that a free morality will cause her to appear. And moreover the entire life ought to be a perpetual smile. In truth it appears that the cross of misunderstood sublimity has left its eternal shadow upon the earth. The horror of a trackless Gehenna weighs upon life at present and the infinite time of futurity; the invincible remembrance of the misery of living and the malediction of human beings mingle with all our thoughts, all our joys!

But Christianity is not the only culpable thing; that exuberance of production, that expenditure of self, that folly as to progress which exhausts us, makes us believe that life is too serious, too hard, that success is too necessary . . . they will not permit any relaxation to nerves strung up to excess. Nothing more sorrowful than this yoke of labor without repose!

From whatever source it may spring, pessimism always deceives us. Man is not the slave of things; by his will he conquers them or conquers himself and thus he is master of his life. To the pessimism of servitude let us oppose the optimism of liberty!

The optimistic method of desire is at bottom very philosophical; especially is it profoundly human. Is it not desire, which, in the secret place of our thought, governs our resolutions, after having fashioned our ideas? Without doubt scarcely are we aware of it, and we wish to prove to ourselves by vigorous proceedings the certainty or the reality of our imaginings. We understand with difficulty that a will is the same as a certitude, and that between two different wills, both of them lofty, truth does not exclude either one or the other.

Isolation seems to us an indication of error and

we become giddy as soon as we believe that we are no longer thinking just like the crowd. But in definite fact, since our opinions and wills are merely the reflections of our desires, we are much more personally original and solitary than we suppose. We think quite alone because to think is to feel. Nothing is more proud and at the same time certain than to affirm the certainty of an ideal for the sole reason that it is grand, that it is generous, that it is fine!

This philosophy does not know skepticism. Is there such a thing as uncertainty, as obstacle for desire.

But there is another way of regarding the rights of the human mind; we can attain the Ideal by another method. Skepticism opens to conscience a domain free of beliefs upon which it can erect solid foundations. More reasonable than that philosophy of instinct which establishes itself on desire, it is [to say the truth] a philosophy of reaction which proceeds from skepticism. Moreover it is entirely personal; and yet it is widely spread, since it is the result of our deceptions.

There is no thinking being, arrived at the threshold of mature age—often indeed at the first rousing of conscience—who has not known the heavy hours of pessimism: disgusted with mankind, enthusiasms cruelly abused, tired of life, still wearier of self, he begins to have doubts of everything which he has believed hitherto: as for dogmas and traditions, he throws aside all the bonds which he has accepted or borne. It is a decisive moment when a man takes the field against his past, against himself. That is the crisis which throws Pascal at the foot of the cross; are not the mystics the skeptics driven to despair?

In this abyss the ignorant and common man, a pessimist from one day to the other, will abandon himself to low temptations, to sensuality or cupidity. The cultivated man, with a more refined and wiser skepticism, will isolate himself in the peace of a jealous independence. He will not accept from life anything but what life can give him in the way of beauty or egoistic pleasure; he will become the dilettante. We the greater number, prisoners to our habits, we continue to live externally as we have existed up to that time, but with a sadder mind and incapable of magnificent willing.

Under the compress of a bitter experience all become in this way the legislators of their own destiny; they acquire for their personal usage a philosophy of existence. Superficial philosophy, doctrine of chance, simple reflex [if you will] of dishonored hopes! Still, a philosophy nearly universal; since it is this personal doctrine that governs the greater part of mankind; and because at bottom it is the hidden law which the thought of the most subtle theorists obey. Along the same road as the ignorant, thinkers march from skepticism to conclusions which are always optimistic—in one sense at least, since they include the hope of something better to be realized. Only, the skepticism of the philosopher is more general, more rational. If he reflects on all his human sorrows, yet does he also understand the infinite deception of doctrines, and he penetrates deeper into the intimate fold of the contemporary soul.

So the skeptical method has a true philosophic worth: by disembarassing thought from erroneous and dangerous systems, it permits one thereby to

conceive of better and surer systems in perfect liberty. Absolute skepticism condenses all the systems founded on religious, metaphysical or scientific certainty; an ideal that should raise itself upon so many ruins, therefore, will be alien to any ambition of certitude. It will be that alone which experience has not yet confounded. If skepticism leaves us in a world of illusions, and if it is impossible to affirm which of them is the least lying, the least chimerical, the ideal of the future will embody itself in the best, most consoling, most smiling of illusions.

Certain minds will not stop short at skepticism; they will pretend to base their ideal on a solid certainty, on positive reasons. Is it a dream? So, to us, the intelligence is able also to attain the ideal by an entirely scientific method, one which philosophy will not reject, the experimental method. Much more fruitful and complete than our two previous methods, this permits one to include a whole body of doctrines—morality, politics, education, primary philosophy, that is to say, the ensemble of problems that interest human curiosity and the direction of life. Submitting to the criterion of experience all the facts of history, all the conjectures of thought, all the knowledge of the ages, it will fashion from all the facts, all the notions controlled by experience a foundation of certainties, upon which it may then erect an ideal and fix the principles of all the studies which attach themselves to the destiny of man.

The integral development of an experimental philosophy will comprehend three grand stages. In the first the entire cycle of historic evolution will be run through; the growth of races, nationalities, the transformations of governments and institutions, the successive forms in the organization of the family, of property; also the various systems of labor, the history of luxuries and of industries; then, the march of the human mind, the birth and death of the gods, of dogmas and rites, the development of philosophical ideas and moral doctrines, the blooming and the twilight of the arts, the long uncertainties of science, and its rapid constitution and settlement—this immense mass of events, institutions, notions, doctrines will be subject to the control of experience; and without doubt no philosophical certitude will survive that control! Science will also end with metaphysical skepticism.

In the second stage the philosopher will attack the problem of the First Cause and human destiny. Seeking in man himself the secret of the future, he will first dissect the soul and determine the powers of it; then, by an induction from a strong likelihood, he will found upon these powers the end of man; and since this end cannot be other than conformed to universal destiny, he will arrive by a bold but undemonstrable hypothesis [but one not without probability] at the Final Cause, and from that at the First Cause of the universe.

In this part of his work the philosopher will illustrate his psychology and his metaphysic or his cosmology by the help of all the general notions which experimental criticism may have verified, and, testing one by the other, comparing the facts of psychology with acquired notions, and with these the external phenomena and the discoveries of science, he will reach thus, without doubt, certain results very nearly rigorous.

Then, in a third stage, deducing all individual and social existence from the destiny of man, he will

found a definite morality, and, putting all things in their places, he will fasten politics to this, politics which cannot be anything else but the instrument of finality and servant of morality; finally, to crown his work, he will face his system of education toward the new ideal. Thus the end-word of experimental philosophy will be a formula of the future.

That such a method will escape from skeptical criticism is infinitely probable. In truth only a complete philosophy can formulate legitimate conclusions. There are no isolated solutions; remove some atoms from one of the elements of a chemical combination, and the combination will not succeed. There is not a political question, not a case of conscience which does not connect itself with the principles of a system; and individual thought, that also, is constantly governed by a systematic conception of things. The immense synthesis whose march I have just sketched, will, I believe, be complete and consequently legitimate.

But can such a work be realized? What loftier ambition than to embrace the universal philosophy of things, decompose by a profound analysis all the elements of our science and then constitute a new universe in a scientific and fruitful synthesis? But, also, what a heavy task! It presupposes a cyclopedic knowledge, a vigor and suppleness of intelligence almost inconceivable. Without question, in order to erect durable conclusions, it would call for the intense and collective efforts of a Pleiad of scientists and thinkers.

It is a work similar to that which Spencer has attempted; the philosophy of evolution, of which he is the magnificent theorist, will remain the honor of the century and the country which saw it born. Perhaps definitive in many of his conclusions, nevertheless the synthesis of Spencer remains incomplete with regard to two capital points. First of all it does not solve the final problem of all philosophies; it leaves us in suspense between that atheism of fact, which results from a universal explanation of things through the sole principle of unconscious Force, and religion, which makes its gains from the impotence in which we find ourselves of discovering beneath this principle the first conscious cause of the universe, of affirming even, or of denying that such a cause exists. On the other side, that vague promise of social progress which Spencer proposes is an ideal at once deceptive [for in fact it is from science that he expects its realization] and too humble—let me out with my whole thought—too practical to exercise a profound and decisive influence on the mind of man!

Man does not accomplish anything grand and durable except under the spur of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is always accompanied by some fantastic dream.

There remains the need of constructing the definitive synthesis which shall furnish the scientific formula of the ideal. A collective labor and one of long continuance, it surpasses doubtless any hope permissible to the present generation. Now the generations of the present wish to live, and that supposes that they give some meaning to the mystery of life, so that they need an explanation which authorizes a will and a hope. The experimental method may conduct us by a simpler, shorter route, open to all minds, up to a certainty, a philosophy, an ideal. It sums itself up in fine in psychology,

as soon as people admit this double postulate: that the end of man is in harmony with his powers, and that, if the atom is an epitome of the universe, the human soul, a kind of sensitive plate upon which the universal reality prints itself, constitutes the least imperfect synthesis which we may be able to obtain from infinite truth.²

Psychology is the key of all the problems which torment us. Thus the psychological method permits each of us to conceive of a personal philosophy endowed with great passion; doubtless our psychology will not support the control of universal experience; but it is a question how to understand which control is the more useful and efficacious, that of psychology controlled by science, or that of science controlled by psychology. Simplified in that way, the experimental method retains all its value. It is very certain, just as it is very practical.³

Through all the paths, by all the methods we shall arrive at the same and double conclusion: the complete emancipation of the individual and the indefinite ascension of beings toward beauty—a double conclusion which can be stated in the formula, *the aesthetic ideal realized in liberty*. Thus our system will be at one and the same time individualistic and æsthetic, and its unity will result from the essential harmony of its two principles.

Individual Autonomy and Æsthetic Ideal are at once determined easily, the one and the other, by this first method, which consists in affirming the certainty of what seems to us the best, the justest, the most beautiful.

I love my independence, I love my liberty as I love to live. Liberty is the pleasure of existing, of exercising one's forces and faculties; it is the joy of thinking and willing, it is [if one wishes] the simple mechanical play of natural activity deploying itself without resistance. Whatever may be its foundation, every attack upon my liberty is a pain. I hate constraint; nay, there is not one being in the world who ought not to detest constraint and adore liberty, because there is not a single one who does not love life! Life and liberty can scarcely be imagined separated one from the other; individualism is the synonym of liberty and also in some measure of existence.

So that the individualistic philosophy is, definitively, a doctrine of life and we hope in fact to show some day that individuality is the very highest

Note 2.—This principle of the conformity of the end and the means seems to us the essential probability of man's uncertain knowledge and that is why we found the capital inductions of psychology in this principle as upon an absolute certainty. It establishes grades, it gives hierarchy in a certain way to the individual destinies, in the same measure and degree by which the faculties differentiate themselves. These evolve, and the individual ends of various beings evolve along with them. But at bottom of all consciences, the half-consciencies of animals, the probable non-consciencies of plants and stones, a uniform effort is accomplished, an identical process is unrolled and thus there is a universal end of which individual destinies are the partial realization.

Note 3.—Psychology can take the place of the universal history of the human race, because there sounds in every civilized conscience the infinite echo of the innumerable hereditaries from which it has descended and of the acts exercised upon each ancestor by the whole of humanity. The process of the eternal development of things, therefore, resolves itself into the universal faculties which tend to become preponderant among those beings that are raised the highest, which, following our arguments, is the æsthetic faculty.

step of existence, the form toward which the universal evolution sets its face.

But is liberty an ideal? It is not even a goal, not even an activity! It is merely a form, a condition of activity, the means to an end, the guarantee of the Ideal. The Ideal alone is a goal and perhaps the object of individual activity.

What will be the ideal of the free individual? The very loftiest which he can possibly imagine (the proof has been given) I cannot conceive anything loftier than the moral ideal; I hope for the realization of it, I wish to realize it, I feel that to it I shall owe my happiness, because it will make my conscience strong and serene.

I know that the day when humanity shall be really moral, humanity will also be happy, because on earth there will not be either war or discord; the sweetness of virtue will have pacified all hatred, softened all wounds, healed all miseries! And I affirm that this moral ideal will not possibly be conceived and yet renounced, for it is a contradiction to imagine a better and happier world and not desire the realization of that world.

In the same way that liberty is a necessity for all men, so the moral ideal is a universal ideal. But perhaps the pure idea of good is lacking in one essential element of influence upon the soul. If it is not possible to imagine the good and yet not desire its accomplishment, there exist desires which are easy-going and inert, longings that are sterile. No fruitful will which has not been enthusiastic! The power of an ideal and its value are therefore measured in terms of the enthusiasm, the passion which it excites and nourishes.

Passion, love exist on dreams and the foundation of dreams is beauty! Everything that we love—virtue, nature, thought, the arts, luxury—everything has its beauty. No taste, no desire which fails to have its æsthetic side, particularly among the most refined beings. In truth, beauty moves the world through pleasure. In order that the moral ideal should acquire all its power, it is necessary therefore that it shall deck itself out with all the seductions of the æsthetic ideal and absorb itself therein.

Is that impossible? No, certainly not, since it is necessary. But after this time all the attempts at a fusion or mutual approach of the Good and the Beautiful have come to nought, because the moralists, faithful to the severe cult of pure ideas and absolute morality, have despoiled beauty of her sensitive, plastic grace, and because artists, somewhat easy-going as to the quality of moral virtues, have made the supreme virtue out of tangible beauty.

Of a verity there is no beauty loftier than the moral act, and the perfection of æsthetic life implies absolute morality. But moral beauty, although it is loftier, does not suppress either beauty of nature or that of works of art. It cannot be conceived of except by beings profoundly sensitive to those two aspects of material beauty. Virtue only smiles in a world where every object has its smile. In order to perceive how beautiful it is, there is first of all need to have understood and adored the beauty of all that lives and all that slumbers in the immobility of matter. Then it is necessary to have known the profound emotion of the most subtle beauties of thought, sentiment and will. Finally the understanding of moral beauty is the conclusion of a long

æsthetic education: to produce fine souls [we shall repeat this often] that is the secret of morality.

Thus it is that moral ascension is accomplished in three stages: from love of plastic beauty the spirit ascends to intelligence and the cult of ideas, then it attains its final goal in the moral act or in the creation which is still action. To the man accustomed to observe the æsthetic character of things who shall have fashioned his soul and life like works of art, the moral act will appear like a new and purer beauty, and thus morality will become the smiling attraction and radiant charm of existence. Virtue will be perfect joy, and the universal dream of beauty which will unfold itself in the human mind, without losing anything of its seductiveness and power, will become an infinite dream of purity, charity and love.

Such is the ideal which I dare affirm the surest because the noblest, the most beautiful, the loftiest which it is possible for me to conceive. By this affirmation I create it; with the will to realize it I create a reality; thus I attain the ideal by the sim-

plest of proceedings. That is the result of our first method.

Moreover, it is an individualistic and æsthetic philosophy which disengages itself from skepticism. At first the autonomy of the individual flows from doubt. It is in the power of no authority to impose a dogma on my mind, of which my mind does not possess an assured proof. I have the right to believe what I believe. A new right attaches to that one: the independence of the moral will: if I have a right it is that of acting like a moral being and no power in the world can bring it about that I should still believe myself moral when I obey a prescription which I find unjust, nor that I should consider myself culpable if I disobey a social convention which my moral feeling condemns.⁴

Note 4.—A single order of prescriptions dominates the conscience absolutely: the law; against which it is not permitted to disobey in any case, because for us it represents the least contestible of the rights of others. Respect for the law, the first principle of morality!

To be continued

YOUNG GERMAINE

It was the Young Germaine,
Forth from the convent shade she stepped
In the flowerful land of Touraine.
Very sweet with her dreams had her spirit kept—
Germaine, of the light, light heart!
With her blue eyes wide apart
And her glowing face with its aureole
Of bright hair outward blown.
So stepped she forth where the Virgin sate
In her marble stole, up over the gate;
And she laughed as she looked on a world unknown,
And, laughing, she murmured, "*La vie est drôle!*"

It was the Young Germaine,
In the maze of the world she trod the dance,
Far from the land of Touraine.
And many a gallant was snared by the glance
Of those wide and innocent eyes—
Wide with a lovely surprise. . . .
But it chanced that the captress, a captive soul,
Was held in Love's toils at last!
How should she know what harvest of grief
May be reaped between budding and fallen leaf!
For she only laughed as the toils drew fast,
And, laughing, she murmured, "*La vie est drôle!*"

It was the hurt Germaine,
Back to the convent shade she came,
In the autumn land of Touraine.
All the torn branches were sighing her name—
Were telling her early doom!
Only one rose abloom
Where the Virgin sate in her marble stole—
A rose so frayed and so meek,
Reached down, as they carried her in through the gate;
And that rose out-of-time, as if seeking its mate,
Touched blindly and softly her cheek.
A little she laughed . . . "*La vie est drôle!*"

Edith M. Thomas